# Blind Citizens Australia logo

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# Position Paper on Employment

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## Background

Employment is the cornerstone of social inclusion. Paid work provides dignity, a source of income and a sense of purpose. People who are blind or vision impaired can and should be meaningfully employed.

People who are blind or vision impaired are excellent employees. They are flexible, skilful and creative. They are also resilient and often possess strong leadership skills, which are honed by the barriers they encounter each day.

People who are blind or vision impaired work in a wide variety of occupations – from accounting, administration and allied healthcare to manufacturing, meteorology and music. Blind Citizens Australia (BCA) is committed to promoting the reliability, dedication and job readiness of people who are blind or vision impaired, most notably through the ‘Eye to the Future’ initiative.

## Responses to common concerns by Employers

### Workplace Health and Safety

In our advocacy work, BCA has encountered several prevailing myths that often prevent employers from hiring people who are blind or vision impaired. Chief amongst them is the fear that people who are blind or vision impaired are at higher risk of experiencing occupational injury. In fact, there is no evidence that people who are blind or vision impaired are more likely to be injured at work than people without a disability.

People who are blind or vision impaired learn strategies to get around safely – often with a white cane or a dog guide – and are, in fact, more likely to take caution and show attentiveness when navigating their surrounds. Handrails and tactile ground surface indicators assist people who are blind or vision impaired in using stairs.

Australian researchers have found that occupational health and safety incidents are six times lower, and workers’ compensation incidents four times lower, for people with disability than for other employees.[[1]](#endnote-1) People with disability are also less likely to take sick leave than other employees.[[2]](#endnote-2) Vision Australia, which employs 100 people who are blind or vision impaired, has not had a single workplace safety incident over a six-year period.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Employers are legally required to maintain a safe workplace for all employees, regardless of whether there is an employee who is blind or vision impaired. All employees benefit from good lighting, clear signage and an obstacle-free workplace.

There is, ultimately, no workplace health and safety basis for not hiring a person who is blind or vision impaired. Having employed a person who is blind or vision impaired, an employer must ensure that evacuation procedures are clearly communicated and accessible to all employees.

### Expense of Workplace Adjustments

Employers often express concern that it is more expensive to hire employees who are blind or vision impaired, due to the need to purchase equipment and conduct special training. However, people who are blind or vision impaired are often eligible for government-funded assistive technology schemes.

Federal government programs such as JobAccess and the Employment Assistance Fund (EAF) facilitate the purchase of work-related modifications, equipment, workplace assistance and support services.[[4]](#endnote-4) These schemes involve employers and employees with disability working together to make reasonable adjustments for their specific needs.

Employers may actually reduce expenses by hiring people who are blind or vision impaired. There are certain things that other employees utilise each day, such as on-site parking and many office supplies, that people who are blind or vision impaired will typically not require.

And because of the higher employment retention rates of people who are blind or vision impaired – research by Vision Australia indicates that 43 per cent of people who are blind or vision impaired stay in the same job for more than five years – employers can also save on recruitment and training costs for new employees.[[5]](#endnote-5)

### Productivity

Some employers have expressed concern about the productivity of people who are blind or vision impaired. When given the right tools, however, people who are blind or vision impaired get the job done. Australian researchers have found that people who are blind or vision impaired are highly adept at using modern technologies such as smartphones.[[6]](#endnote-6) All that is required of employers is to give people who are blind or vision impaired a chance.

When implementing new technology – e.g., databases, email systems and phone systems – employers must be mindful that the technology is compatible with the assistive technology – e.g., screen reading software – used by employees who are blind or vision impaired.

### Transport

Many job advertisements include possession of a driver’s licence as a mandatory requirement or desirable attribute. There are a select few roles – e.g., driving a taxi or delivery van – that actually require a driver’s licence. Unnecessary inclusion of a driver’s licence requirement dissuades people who are blind or vision impaired from applying for a position which they may otherwise be perfect for.

Removing reference to a driver’s licence where it is not a genuine requirement may benefit employers. People who are blind or vision impaired manage their transport in a variety of ways without the use of a car. They may choose to walk, catch public transport, take a taxi or rideshare, or use technology for virtual meetings. Employing a person who is blind or vision impaired may actually save money by eliminating unnecessary business trips.

## Policy Solutions

The barriers to employment for people who are blind or vision impaired remain unacceptably high. In 2021, the publication of Ernst & Young’s decade-long survey of 1,000 employers revealed that 92 per cent of people involved in recruitment had concerns about hiring someone who was blind or vision impaired.[[7]](#endnote-7) The main concerns of these employers – workplace health and safety, expense of workplace adjustments, productivity and transport – have been addressed in this Position Paper.

Employers should increasingly employ people with disability. In so doing, they would gain access to an underutilised source of labour and make their products more appealing to Australian consumers, one in five of whom lives with some form of disability. To spur this action, BCA recommends the following legislative action be taken by the federal government.

## Recommendations

To encourage the employment of people who are blind or vision impaired, BCA recommends the federal government undertake the following reforms:

1. Strengthen the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) to require employers to actively eliminate systemic discrimination in the workplace.
2. Provide sufficient funding to ensure people with disability can take employment-related breaches of the DDA to the Australian Human Rights Commission at low or no cost.
3. Employ a greater number of people with disability in the Australian Public Service, including in leadership positions.
4. Establish disability employment support services for people over the age of 65, as people over 65 cannot currently access Disability Employment Service (DES) providers.
5. Develop an awareness campaign to inform employers of the existence of JobAccess and other such schemes to purchase workplace equipment and employment supports for people who are blind or vision impaired.

1. Blind Citizens Australia, “Hello Employers: How to Successfully Work With and Integrate People   
   Who are Blind or Vision Impaired in Your Team,” accessed 18 September 2023, <https://www.bca.org.au/attachments/policies/for_employers.doc>   
    [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Blind Citizens Australia, “Myths About Employment and People Who are Blind or Vision Impaired,   
   accessed 18 September 2023, <https://www.bca.org.au/attachments/policies/mythbusters.doc>   
    [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. ABC News, “People with Vision Impairment Still Face Discrimination When Looking for Work, Survey Finds,” 7 September 2021, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-09-07/vision-australia-finds-attitudes-still-barrier-to-work/100436490>   
    [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. JobAccess, “Employment Assistance Fund (EAF),” 9 November 2022, <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/employment-assistance-fund-eaf>   
    [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Blind Citizens Australia, “Hello Recruiters: How to Successfully Recruit a Person Who is Blind or Vision Impaired,” accessed 18 September 2023, <https://www.bca.org.au/attachments/policies/for_recruiters.doc>   
    [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Kathryn Locke et al., “Smartphones and Equal Access for People Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision,”   
   Curtin University, August 2020, [https://ccat.curtin.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2021/01/  
   VisionAustraliaSmartphoneReportACC.pdf](https://ccat.curtin.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/33/2021/01/VisionAustraliaSmartphoneReportACC.pdf)  
    [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. ABC News, “People with Vision Impairment Still Face Discrimination When Looking for Work.”  
    [↑](#endnote-ref-7)